

## CREATING SAFE AND STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS

### A Public Safety Plan for Wilmington

Dennis P. Williams, Mayor

#### THE NATURE OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY PROBLEM IN WILMINGTON

Over the past ten years or more, Wilmington, Delaware has become a very dangerous place. Its high crime rate has all but destroyed the quality of life of the residents, and it continues to limit the economic growth potential of the city and of the entire state of Delaware. The crime problem in Wilmington is worse than many big cities in the same region of the country. While cities like Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh have maintained stable violent crime rates over the past decade, crime in Wilmington has grown in volume. The most serious violent crimes in Wilmington are committed by a small segment of the population who has access to illegal firearms. This violence often takes place between rival drug crews—small groups of youths connected by the common purpose of crime, especially the sale and use of illegal drugs. In addition to the violence, property crimes like burglary, theft, and senseless vandalism continue to plague city residents. The overall social and economic well-being of city residents has grown worse over the past decade, in large part because of the escalation of crime.

Crime and fear of crime can affect how people feel about their communities and their personal investment in them. This leads to a breakdown in relationships and the informal controls that are so important to keeping communities safe and healthy. When residents are not sharing *informal* guardianship over the public space, they are forced to rely on the *formal* controls (i.e., the police and criminal justice system) when even minor problems occur. Disputes between young juveniles, public gatherings of loud and expressive teens, and kids skipping school have become “police problems.” When these violations--and others like them-- increase and combine with rising crime, the police become unable to successfully resolve them all, resulting in strained police-community relations. This strained relationship keeps communities and the police from developing the types of strong relationships that really have a chance to

making communities safe. ***Making communities safe is the central focus of our public safety strategy.***

The WPD strategy has three primary foci: 1) ending the criminal careers of serious violent offenders, 2) enforcing laws which affect the quality of life in Wilmington neighborhoods, and 3) building strong relationships within communities and between the police and neighborhood residents. First, WPD will begin working with state and federal prosecutors and police to identify and prosecute serious violent offenders. The department will follow the Project Safe Neighborhood approach which has been tested in many major cities in the United States with great success. Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is “a nationwide commitment to reduce gun and gang crime in America by networking existing local programs that target gun and gun crime and providing these programs with additional tools necessary to be successful. Since its inception in 2001, approximately \$2 billion has been committed to this initiative. This funding is being used to hire new federal and state prosecutors, support investigators, provide training, distribute gun lock safety kits, deter juvenile gun crime, and develop and promote community outreach efforts as well as to support other gun and gang violence reduction strategies.” (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2001). WPD has begun efforts to bring experts to Wilmington the help organize according to PSN design. WPD will also work with federal and state agencies to identify continuing criminal conspiracies and to investigate and prosecute these criminal networks.

In addition, WPD will increase the presence of uniformed officers on the street. These officers will respond to emergency calls for services and vigorously enforce criminal laws. At the same time patrol officers will work with residents to solve chronic neighborhood problems, thereby, enhancing the quality of life in Wilmington neighborhoods.

Finally, WPD will work to build stronger more effective relationships within neighborhoods and between the police and residents. Effective relationships inside and across neighborhoods are what function as the community’s “immune system.” In healthy neighborhoods harmful behaviors can be dealt with immediately, either informally by residents, formally by the police, or in some combination of the two. The immediate response helps keep things from getting worse. And, an open dialogue between the police and community provides

the space to discourage apathy and non-involvement on one hand and vigilantism on the other. Our goal is to make neighborhoods safe again, so that the city of Wilmington and the entire state of Delaware will reap benefits. We will reverse the downward spiraling effect of violent crime, and we will move city neighborhoods toward better economic and social health and well-being. We will follow an approach to neighborhood policing which matches policing styles with varying neighborhood types. Neighborhoods will be identified as being “strong” (low crime and high resident participation), “vulnerable” (low crime and low resident participation), “anomic” (high crime and low resident participation), and “responsive” (high crime and high resident participation.) Each type of neighborhood calls for a different policing strategy. We believe by matching the police approach to the neighborhood type, we will be more successful in reducing crime and building strong relationships.

The escalating violence in Wilmington calls for new and immediate actions from the police. It also calls for the development of long-term strategies for strengthening relationships between Wilmington residents and the police. We will first describe our immediate actions to deal with the escalating violence

## **IMMEDIATE AND AGGRESSIVE STEPS TO DEAL WITH VIOLENT CRIME**

### ***1. Increase the number of uniformed officers assigned to patrol division.***

The department will significantly increase the number of officers in uniform and on patrol responding to calls for service. These patrol officers will maintain a high visibility and will assist citizens in keeping their neighborhoods safe. The patrol officers will aggressively enforce laws which affect the peace and general welfare of Wilmington citizens. They will enforce nuisance complaints, disrupt corner drug markets, and maintain peace and order throughout the city. At the same time officers will seek to forge collaborative relationships with residents so that they will be more effective in solving problems together. Patrol officers will be assigned to areas based on the analysis of crime and intelligence data.

### ***2. Identify and Train Specialists to Integrate the Safe Neighborhood Philosophy Department and Citywide***

Community policing is a means to an end; the end being a “safe neighborhood.” This is the ultimate goal at which we will aim and from which we will measure success. In order for the safe-neighborhood philosophy to be integrated throughout the department, a team of specialists will be assembled, trained and deployed. Their purpose will be to strengthen relationships with residents, connect police resources to specific community problems and crimes, to coordinate deployment of resources, and to assess whether the strategies being implemented by the police and community are working. If the strategies are not working—i.e., to make the neighborhoods safe—new strategies will be developed and implemented. Community policing specialists will play a key role in all aspects of our public safety strategy. These officers will be trained in the situational approach to community policing.

### ***3. Expand a Gun Unit***

In order to reduce the city’s gun violence, the department will aggressively seek to remove illegal guns from circulation before they wind up being used in a crime. When guns are seized by the police, the department will take steps identify criminal offenders who may have used it in previous crimes. Specifically, the department will create a “Gun Unit”, which will be devoted to investigating illegal firearm-related incidents. This unit will ensure that all leads generated through ATF’s E-Trace and the National Integrated Ballistic Identification Network (NIBIN)--as well as firearms with obliterated serial numbers-- are thoroughly investigated.

This unit, which will operate out of the Criminal Investigative Division, will work closely with agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. By working together, we will follow the gun, from the point of purchase, to its ultimate recovery. Every illegal gun tells a story. It is through that story that we will link individuals to their crimes.

The result of these Illegal firearm investigations will be presented to either the United States Attorney’s Office or the Delaware Attorney General’s Office. In addition, these investigators will work in conjunction with Delaware’s Fusion Center, the Delaware Information and Analysis Center (DIAC) which will ensure intelligence layering within all stages of the investigation. It is only through sharing information and working collaboratively with other agencies that we can fully utilize the intelligence in all facets of the criminal investigations. This

collaborative effort prevents the typical “stove piping” of intelligence that is currently occurring. This administration will fully utilize all state and federal partnerships, as well as their resources to identify illegal firearms before they become involved in violence. The Gun Unit will be the focal point of the Project Safe Neighborhood Efforts.

#### ***4. Establish a Street- Crime Unit***

A Street-Crime Unit will be established within the Patrol Division. It will address in-progress felony complaints, as well as complaints that influence the disruption of the quality of life within neighborhoods. These officers will respond to complaints such as drug dealing, prostitution, and disorderly groups. The Street Crime Unit will also respond to all firearm-related incidents. This unit will gather detailed intelligence, which will flow laterally to the Wilmington Intelligence Officer and to the Delaware Fusion Center. Based on current crime trends and community needs, this unit will have the flexibility to work in plain clothes as needed. The unit will incorporate many of the effective components of the “safe streets” concept and will provide support to the Gun Unit, Federal Task Forces, and the Drug, Organized Crime and Vice Division. Implementation of this unit will also lessen the burden on the Patrol Division and allow that division to focus on responding to emergency calls of service and other activities aimed at making neighborhoods safer and healthier. The Street Crime Unit may become the starting point for officers who desire to someday work in the Detective Division or the Drug Organized Crime and Vice Division.

#### ***5. Building Relationships with Local, State, and Federal Criminal Justice Agencies***

In order to effectively reduce crime in Wilmington, it is essential that we create strong working relationships with our federal, state and local law enforcements counterparts. The violent crime in Wilmington is not restricted to geographic boundaries. Violent offenders and victims of crimes that occur in Wilmington come from all over the state and throughout the entire geographic region. We need to work collaboratively and intelligently to identify criminal groups and to develop strategies to effectively eliminate these groups. Assigning officers to task force

operations outside of the department or participating in monthly meetings with investigators from various agencies does not constitute a working partnership with these agencies. It includes these types of activities and much more.

This administration will immediately meet with the leaders of Delaware's law enforcement community to establish structures and processes for ongoing dialogue and collaboration. We will work to forge strong relationships with federal, state, and local agencies in order to capitalize on a richer and broader array of knowledge, expertise, and technology in a variety of specialized fields. It is through these relationships that we can also develop our own capacity for criminal investigation and prevention.

In addition, this administration will work closely with the Delaware Attorney General's Office and the United States Attorney's Office to establish working partnerships with them as well. We will work with these agencies to improve on our abilities to collect evident and present that evidence in a court of law. It is also essential, particularly in future firearm violence investigations, to develop prosecutable strategies in early stages of the investigation to ensure success. Regardless of how effective a department's policing deployment strategies are, a public safety plan will never be truly successful without a coordinated strategy that includes state and federal prosecutors.

#### ***6. Build Relationships with the Department of Corrections and others to Help Offenders Successfully Re-Enter Wilmington Neighborhoods***

Our approach to public safety will include helping individuals returning from prison get reconnected with neighbors and with resources in their neighborhoods. To do this we will work with neighborhood groups and with public and private organizations whose goal it is to help people return from prison successfully. There are a number of successful strategies being employed under the term "restorative justice" that employ re-entry as a means for building safe and strong neighborhoods. This administration will begin efforts immediately to try and test new strategies for helping people return from prison successfully.

#### ***7. Target the Most Complex Problems and Create Comprehensive Solutions***

The majority of the violent crime in Wilmington is committed by a small segment of the population, sometimes called street or neighborhood “crews.” These groups engage in violent behavior promoting or protecting drug-related activities which prevent neighborhoods from becoming safe. This administration will implement long term proactive strategies that target the most serious violent offenders and their entire criminal group. The goal will be to build conspiracy cases to be prosecuted in either federal or state court, where offenders are effectively removed from criminal activity for an appropriate period of time. These types of investigations can only be accomplished through collaborative enforcement efforts. We will establish true partnerships with our federal and state law enforcement counterparts. In addition, we will build strong working relationships with federal and state prosecutors. The crime in Wilmington is not just a Wilmington problem; its effects can be felt throughout the state both economically and personally. It is for this very reason that partnerships must be forged, so that collectively we can work together to solve these issues on a much broader scale.

The department, through the WPD Intelligence Unit-- and in working with community policing and juvenile offender specialists-- will coordinate efforts to identify at-risk juveniles involved in petty crimes and status offenses. We will make every effort to deter and redirect young people from joining these neighborhood crews. Rather than building cases for prosecution, the goal will be to divert these individuals from climbing the criminal career ladder. Once vulnerable youth have been identified, WPD will work collaboratively with social service agencies to identify resources and networks that will help keep them safe and out of the criminal justice system.

In addition, a group of city department heads will meet monthly with community policing specialists and neighborhood representatives to develop comprehensive solutions to the most complex public safety problems in the city. Once the strategies are developed they will be deployed with maximum coordination. We will aim at addressing 12 cases per year which will be evaluated for effectiveness. These case studies will be published so that we all will learn about what works and doesn't work.

## LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

### Some General Observations About Policing in the United States

Beginning in the late 1970s, and particularly as a result of conflicts between police and the community during the civil rights days of the 1960s, a new era of policing emerged called *community policing*. It was informed by research, none more influential than “broken windows,” a theory advanced by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling connected deteriorating physical and social conditions to increases in violent crime. The broken windows theory argued that physical disorder, such as the presence of litter, graffiti, abandoned cars, vacant buildings and drug paraphernalia, and social disorder, including the presence of panhandlers, prostitutes, disorderly and homeless groups, will lead to violent crime. So community policing strategies emanating from this theory included zero-tolerance campaigns and law enforcement sweeps aimed at arresting lots of citizens for minor non-violent offenses. These types of policing strategies, albeit well intentioned, often worked to deteriorate police community relations by pitting the police against local residents.

New research points us in a slightly different direction. Social scientists today tell us that building and sustaining strong relationships between residents and the police is considered a much more effective long-term strategy for public safety. Instead of simply fixing broken windows, we will also fix broken relationships. ***Solving problems together builds relationships and prevents crime.*** The ways of doing this involve dialogue with citizens about the nature of the crime problem and the strategies that might work. Unilateral action on the part of the police to solve neighborhood problems is inconsistent with our approach because it can work against efforts to strengthen community ties.

In addition to these insights, the scientific and technological aspects of policing have advanced so much so that we now have many new opportunities to become more effective in criminal investigations and prosecutions. Forensic biology and chemistry now provide great tools for catching and convicting violent offenders *and* exonerating innocent suspects.

Computing technology and database design have advanced to the point where they can help police detect crime trends and to analyze crime problems in ways never imagined a decade ago. This administration will capitalize on all of these advances.

Police officials play a key role in a broad array of activities beyond simply arresting those who break the law. Victims and whole communities suffer when crimes are committed. The police can provide the type of resources to help with the healing process. And, once offenders have been punished for their crimes, they too will return to our communities and will need our support. In addition, neighborhood crime prevention, emergency services, intelligence and crime analysis, criminal investigation, forensic evidence collection and analysis are all part of a full police repertoire and will be included in the new public safety strategy in Wilmington.

In summary, the public safety plan for the city of Wilmington is grounded in the belief that by building strong relationships within and across neighborhoods, the police can be much more effective in their efforts to keep the citizens of Wilmington safe and the city neighborhoods vibrant and healthy. In addition, the relationships with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies must also be strengthened in order to maximize our ability to identify and apprehend the most dangerous criminal offenders. Finally, our approach to problem solving and criminal investigations will be based on the habits of science. The Wilmington Police Department will become a learning organization, always seeking to further what officers know about the policing profession. By reflecting on the outcomes of our strategies, we will avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. Like science our approach will be open for public comment and will take advantage of as many diverse perspectives as possible. And, we will use the most relevant information available from the physical, social, and computer sciences all in order to keep neighborhoods safe and strong. With a firm grounding in the professional field, we will work as full partners with the residents of Wilmington to provide policing services that are second to none. *We will never again be the place where crime flourishes beyond our ability to control it.*

In the following sections we will provide ten (10) general principles on which our long term strategies will be based..

## TEN PRINCIPLES OF LONG-TERM REFORM AT WPD

### ***1. Restore Professionalism in Wilmington's Public Safety Departments***

Officers will be afforded opportunities to develop professionally throughout their careers by working in various divisions and learning new skills throughout the department. It will be this administration's responsibility to develop creative opportunities for transfers, promotions, and to offer training in the latest technologies. Transfers and promotions will be based on commitment to community-based mission, dedication to professional growth and development, and results. No longer will transfers, promotions, special recognitions and awards be influenced by personal relationships within the department. The fair distribution of incentives and opportunities for all individuals in the department is essential to maintaining high morale and a professional orientation.

### **2. Identify "Building and Maintaining Safe Communities" as the Goal of Policing**

It is sometimes easy to mistake means for ends in evaluating policing efforts. In this administration success will not mean the number of arrests that are made or the quantity of the drugs or guns that are seized. Instead, success means that our communities are safe and the quality of life has been restored. Measuring desired ends rather than means will require new tools and new metrics to "measure what matters," i.e., real *outcomes* such as reduced crime ***and*** increased community support, participation, and safety.

The functions of the police are diverse, but all must converge on the common goal of building safe neighborhoods. This means that all policy and training must be redesigned to include this goal. For example, training curricula must include courses such as "homicide investigation for building safe neighborhoods," "burglary investigations for building safe neighborhoods," "internal affairs investigations for building safe neighborhoods." By training officers in this way, we can ensure that most policing activities will eventually include an important segment of connecting with residents in positive ways. This is how partnerships between the police and community will be strengthened and communities will become safer.

### **3. Build and Strengthen Relationships with the Community**

The police and neighborhood residents must develop strong bonds and trusting relationships so that they can work closely together to create safe communities. Sustained dialogue between residents and police will help in this regard, but it is not enough. Community members must have access to the police to provide a wide array of input on the causes and solutions to neighborhood crime. The WPD headquarters must become a building that welcomes citizens and provides easy access to emergency and non-emergency services. WPD must use social media among other technological advances to make civic participation easier and more effective.

### **4. Build and Strengthen Relationships with Local, State, Federal Law Enforcement Agencies and Organizations and Agencies Throughout the Criminal Justice System**

Criminal activity is not tied to jurisdictional boundaries. Effective law enforcement, therefore, is severely limited when relationships between agencies are strained or nonexistent. Police agencies seek to forge and sustain strong relationships with other criminal justice agencies to share resources and information making all more successful. Crime prevention, criminal investigations, crime and intelligence analysis, victim services, community outreach, and offender reintegration all require good working relationships between and among a vast array of agencies.

### **5. Help Officers Develop Over an Entire Career.**

Successful police agencies offer individual officers real opportunities to develop and grow over the entire length of a career. WPD will be the place where the best candidates want to come and work, because it is a place to advance in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities and career opportunities. The old way is secretive and insular and ineffective. It creates internal and external conflicts. Inside the old WPD, life is a feudal barony in which officers are rewarded for loyalty to supervisors rather than what is right and just and on merit. Promotions, advancements, transfers, and all opportunities in this administration will be awarded based on organizational needs and individual merit.

## **6. Organize for Continuous Learning and Development**

WPD must become a learning organization. This means that it will incorporate structures and processes for incorporating the best public safety practices. Officials will not be afraid to offer new ideas to see what works, because all strategies will be administered on a trial basis. We will learn from our own experiences. This approach is based in a philosophy of critical reasoning. Everything we do will be evaluated for effectiveness. Never will something that doesn't work continue beyond a trial period. In addition, we will study the literature on policing and community development and we must conduct our own research to find the best strategies for different types of neighborhoods. We must also remain fully engaged with academicians and public intellectuals who can help us learn and see new ways to conduct effective policing activities.

## **7. Utilize the Most Advanced Scientific Research and Technological Tools**

Successful police organizations must develop and reward individuals who have skills and abilities in scientific areas, such as in forensic chemistry and biology, in order to benefit from the most recent advances in these fields. Likewise, new technologies have enabled law enforcement officials to examine large quantities of data in ways never before available. WPD must seek to hire and develop individuals trained to use advanced technology and who are able to conduct sophisticated data analyses. We will seek to hire individuals with graduate degrees in forensic, computer, and social sciences in order to further our abilities in all of these areas.

## **8. Become Active in Professional Police and Public Safety Organizations**

WPD officials must join and become active in professional groups like the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE). Members of the WPD will be encouraged to interact with organizations such as the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) and the American Society of Criminology (ASC) whose members seek new and better ways of conducting police

and public safety activities. Relationships formed with members of these groups will help local police remain at the cutting edge of policing and public safety policy.

## **9. Tailor Policing Strategies to Particular Neighborhoods**

Policing strategies will be designed at the neighborhood level. There is no one-size-fits-all policing strategy. Successful law enforcement agencies can take advantage of neighborhood dynamics by joining with residents to implement strategies that are designed specifically to their own needs and desires. Working with residents, officers will be able to help develop short and long-term strategies toward the goal of creating safe, healthy, and resilient neighborhoods.

## **10. Work Closely with Labor, Elected Officials, and All Stakeholders in the Creation of Safe Wilmington Neighborhoods**

We will be fully engaged with the FOP, City Council, state representatives and members of other professional groups toward the common goal of creating safe neighborhoods in Wilmington. By doing so, our efforts can unite with the many initiatives underway aimed at local and statewide economic development and the overall growth of Wilmington as a safe and vibrant city for residents, businesses, and visitors.

Today, more than ever, it is essential to utilize all available resources to ensure the success of the city of Wilmington's Public Safety Plan. By working with organizations, which have a vested interest in the City of Wilmington, as well as, those organizations that are involved with city employees, we can effectively move this city into a safe and prosperous future. It was not long ago that the Fraternal Order of Police voted "No Confidence" in the entire command staff of the Wilmington Police Department. This administration will work closely with the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) to ensure that personnel issues are handled promptly and fairly. By working closely with the FOP, as partners in the development of a safe city, the administration will constantly be exposed to fresh new ideas from officers encountering issues first hand. We will also work closely with the Wilmington Association of Retired Police (WARP). These retired officers still possess the devotion that they had while members of the

Wilmington police Department and may be willing to help as needed in a variety of ways toward the mission of the department.

In addition, this administration will work with City Council and other elected officials statewide. We all benefit from safe Wilmington neighborhoods and all have a role to play in making it happen. Collectively we can resolve the current crime and financial issues facing this city. Community leaders, business owners, every stakeholder within this city will have a voice and the opportunity to meet with government officials to discuss the issues that impact their lives and livelihoods. This administration is looking forward to exploring new and creative ideas that will produce opportunities to transform our neighborhoods and business districts into safe places to live and build a future.